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## REVIEWS.

*Selections from Sir Thomas Malory's Morte Darthur.* Edited with introduction, notes, and glossary by William Edward Mead, Ph.D. Ginn & Company, Athenaeum Press Series: Boston, 1897. Pp. lxii, 348.

*Selections from Malory's Le Morte D'Arthur.* Edited with introduction, notes, and glossary by A. T. Martin, M.A., F.S.A. The Macmillan Company: London and New York, 1897. Pp. xxxvi, 254.

PROFESSOR MEAD'S *Selections* may claim a definite place among the happily increasing number of 'contributions to the study of our fifteenth-century literature. For serious investigation of Malory, of course only Sommer's<sup>1</sup> monumental work can be considered. The kind of reader that Malory wrote for is so well provided in Sir Edward Strachey's<sup>2</sup> edition that those who are not annoyed by its small print will do well to resist even the pretty volumes of the Temple Classics.' Professor Mead's book is for college classes. The 'general reader,' though he is included in the design of the series, should not be encouraged to read Malory in selections.

Still these selections are typical, and they are whole books: the first book and the last, the book of Balyn and Balan (II), and the Grail books (XIII, XVII, and XVIII). The text is that of Sommer, but with modern punctuation and the expansion (in italics) of Caxton's contractions. The critical apparatus is admirably compact and serviceable. There are two indexes and a glossary.

At the head of the notes stands a list of a dozen main sources of information, which, barring Kellner's *Historical Outlines of English Syntax*, are both well chosen and accessible.

<sup>1</sup> *Le Morte Darthur* by Syr Thomas Malory. The original edition of William Caxton, now reprinted and edited with an Introduction and Glossary by H. Oskar Sommer, Ph.B. David Nutt: London. Vol. I, Text, 1889; vol. II, Introduction and glossary, 1890; vol. III, Studies on the Sources, 1891.

<sup>2</sup> In the Macmillans' 'Globe' series.

<sup>3</sup> Edited by Israel Gollancz, for Dent of London.

The notes (pp. 241-323) consist mainly of references to these, and brief quotations from them; but there are also some interesting parallels. The glossary (pp. 325-336), by wisely omitting etymologies, is sufficient in small space. I note only a few trifling inaccuracies. *Atte* is cited only as a contraction, though its use as a simple preposition is noted on page 292. *Pyghe* (*pitch*, v.) is doubtful as a present form. *Tone* for *true*, as a definition of *sothe*, seems to be the only misprint.

The most important single part of the introduction (ii) is the probable identification of Sir Thomas Malory, abridged by the general editor of the series, Professor Kittredge, from his article in *Harvard Studies and Notes in Philology and Literature* 5, 85-105. Professor Mead's own sections deal with (i) the literary character of the fifteenth century, (iii) editions of the *Morte Darthur*, (iv) the purpose and method, (v) the sources, (vi) the history and influence, (vii) the literary value. These sixty pages contain a really remarkable amount of summary information.

In his concluding section, the editor passes from a simple, right statement of the literary value of translation (pp. lii-liii) to a summary of the literary value of Malory's method as a whole. Professor Mead is free from Sommer's mechanical conception. He demurs at Sommer's assumption of 'sources' that cannot be found; and in another place (Notes, pp. 305-310) he disproves the charge of servile copying. Yet, with all this, he seems to lay undue stress on Malory's weakness in construction. Of course, as Professor Mead himself observes, this must remain an open question, at least for some years; but meantime it is important to give students, so far as we can, the right point of view. Therefore it is unfortunate to take up (xxv-xxvi) the word *epic* of previous discussions, as if it were in this connection something more than a vague misuse. Malory's work is not epic, for the sufficient reason that it is a romance; but we have still to discuss its construction. And, again, how can our conception of Malory's originality (p. li, foot-note) be affected by the discovery of a source for Book vii? What is meant by originality?

On the other hand, Professor Mead furnishes all the materials for the judgment on Malory's constructive skill which he hesitates to pronounce. If Malory reduced by nine-tenths an enormous mass of material that almost baffles analysis; if in

this reduction he re-arranged and recombined the main sources which have been analyzed by Sommer and others, not only suppressing, but also inserting, in a way to irritate the critic whose eye is on those sources; then in his translation he worked in the fashion of a constructive artist. Much of his material was by tradition inflexible. He would not have been easily pardoned for omitting any cardinal part of the vast accretion. His readers would have felt cheated. Yet, in spite of this, he has not only come nearer to unity than his own time dreamed of coming; he has also achieved a romance that even now, in our time of dramatic ideals in narrative, may be felt as a whole.

Every one feels that the last book is a culmination. Every one feels also the office of the earlier, Merlin parts, in giving the tone of mystery. The Grail books, in spite of many lapses from coherence, crown the struggles that precede, and prepare for the end. Balyn and Balan, or Beaumayns, may serve simply as cumulative impressions of the romantic chivalry. They may be out of proportion. Certainly Tristram is out of proportion; but Tristram, Isoude, King Mark, are made foils for Lancelot, Guinevere, King Arthur. In a word, Malory's work has literary quality, not only of diction, though that of course is its main charm, but also to a remarkable degree, all things considered, of construction. He was not Chaucer; but he was, in his way, an artist. It will not do to regard him as 'a plain man who has a plain task,—to reduce a set of French romances to portable form, and to suppress his own personality as much as possible' (p. lx). How then should we 'find no romance in English to compare with the *Morte Darthur*' (p. xxviii)?

Mr. Martin's *Selections* are gauged for younger students. He presents (pp. 1-186) such an abridgement of Strachey's text as makes a continuous narrative. A brief introduction summarizes the historical basis and Malory's main sources, repeats in serene unconsciousness the obsolete speculations as to Malory himself, and adds a few pertinent observations on the style. The notes on the grammar display an ignorance of both inflections and syntax that is little short of astounding. There is a brief glossary, an index, and a table showing the chapters in Strachey from which the selections are taken.

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